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From Crisis to Calling: Ignatian Leadership as Transformative Pedagogy in Contemporary Higher Education

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Abstract

Contemporary university students face a profound crisis of meaning, marked by technological acceleration and existential fragmentation. This article presents the Ignatian Leadership course as a required subject within the university curriculum, conceived as an experiential and countercultural response rooted in the Jesuit educational tradition. Through a qualitative and hermeneutic approach, it articulates a path of personal and communal transformation based on seven interrelated attributes: self-knowledge, inner freedom, discernment, *magis*, meaning, love, and transcendence. The proposals analyzed offer an anthropology of vocation, an experiential spirituality, and an integrative pedagogy. This research draws upon academic literature, pedagogical

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experience, and both qualitative and quantitative data from programs implemented at Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Creighton University, Ateneo de Manila University, and the Programa de Liderazgo Ignaciano Universitario Latinoamericano (PLIUL). The study highlights the transformative power of this bold initiative to renew the mission of the university and accompany young people in their search for fullness.

Keywords

contemporary youth – crisis of meaning – Ignatian leadership – Ignatian pedagogy – integral education – Jesuit education – spiritual pedagogy – vocational discernment

Introduction

In the early decades of the twenty-first century, youth culture is marked by profound symbolic dislocation. Unlike previous generations, contemporary university students develop in an environment shaped by fluid references, temporal acceleration, and existential precariousness. The cultural narratives that once structured the transition to adulthood—stable employment, marriage, economic independence—have lost their normative force, giving way to an existential horizon defined by ambivalence, prolonged self-exploration, and the ongoing reconstruction of identity.[1] Although many young people still harbor a latent desire for authenticity and transcendence, this interior longing is often stifled by digital hyperconnectivity, fragmented attention, and the lack of institutional spaces that foster existential discernment.[2]

In this context of spiritual disorientation and informational saturation, the educational mission of the university is increasingly called into question. The tension between technical training and existential accompaniment is especially acute in Catholic institutions of higher education, whose identity has historically been grounded in an integral vision of the human person. In Jesuit universities, this tension takes on particular depth. Since their inception, Jesuit educational institutions have not limited themselves to the transmission of

1 Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Jeffrey Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: Understanding the New Way of Coming of Age," in *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, ed. Jeffrey Arnett and Jennifer Tanner (Washington, DC: APA, 2006), 3–19.

2 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

knowledge but have instead pursued a sapiential form of education, oriented toward forming free, reflective individuals committed to the common good.[3]

This formative vocation has historically taken shape through a pedagogical and spiritual approach rooted in the experience of the Spiritual Exercises, and further systematized through the *Ratio studiorum*, the Jesuits' educational framework that across historical eras guided the integral formation of students in schools and universities across the world. Over the centuries, this approach has inspired diverse pedagogical formulations that, despite changing historical contexts, consistently emphasize interior growth. While in recent decades some Jesuit universities have tended to relegate or dilute this spiritual dimension in their educational programs, in recent years they have begun to recover it through curricular initiatives that seek to reinsert meaning, interiority, and personal vocation as important aspects of the university experience.

One such initiative is the course "Ignatian Leadership," which has emerged in various countries as a privileged space for exploring some of the most pressing existential questions—Who am I? What is the meaning of my life? Does God exist?—in dialogue with the Ignatian spiritual and pedagogical tradition. Unlike other Ignatian leadership programs or similar initiatives commonly offered as extracurricular activities in many Jesuit universities, this course fully integrates into the official academic curriculum, with defined content, evaluative criteria, and mandatory inclusion in undergraduate study plans. Its curricular status marks a significant distinction by institutionalizing vocational and spiritual formation within the university's educational structure.

This study asks to what extent such a course can offer a meaningful response to the crisis of meaning facing today's university students. More specifically, how can the Ignatian leadership paradigm, when developed as a curricular course, contribute to the discovery of personal vocation and the construction of a meaningful life in the contemporary context?

The article is structured in three parts to address this question. First, it analyzes the sociocultural and anthropological context of university students, with special attention to the factors that hinder a deeper search for meaning. Second, it examines how the Jesuit university, faithful to its tradition, can offer an alternative framework of integral formation in contrast to the prevailing technocratic model. Finally, it presents the Ignatian Leadership course as a pedagogical experience that, structured around seven essential attributes—self-knowledge, interior freedom, discernment, *magis*, meaning, love, and transcendence—offers a path of personal maturation and spiritual openness in continuity with the Ignatian tradition. The proposal is analyzed

3 John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 201–25.

in light of its theoretical foundations, practical implementation, and potential for replication in other university contexts.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative and hermeneutic approach grounded in theological, philosophical, and pedagogical reflection. It builds upon a prior scoping review conducted by the authors, following the protocol developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), with the aim of mapping, synthesizing, and interpreting the essential components of Ignatian Leadership as found in academic literature and foundational sources of the Society of Jesus. The study assumes an understanding of knowledge as interpretive and situated: rather than aiming at generalization, it engages in a dialogical reading of texts and experiences, guided by the spiritual and educational horizon of the Ignatian tradition. The authors' position as educators and researchers in Jesuit universities enabled them to integrate this review as an intellectual and formative process of discernment.

The scoping review was carried out in five stages. First, a systematic search was conducted in academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ATLA, Dialnet, and others, using combinations of terms related to leadership and Ignatian spirituality. A total of forty-eight documents were selected, all of which offered well-founded descriptions of leadership attributes. These included peer-reviewed articles, academic theses, internal Jesuit documents, and relevant pedagogical materials.

Second, an inductive coding process was applied with thematic analysis to identify recurring concepts related to the personal, relational, and organizational dimensions of leadership. In the third phase, these findings were compared with existing models (Lowney, San Juan, Guibert, Byron, Dufresne, Broscombe), enabling a triangulation of classical sources, contemporary literature, and teaching experience.

The final seven attributes—self-knowledge, inner freedom, discernment, *magis*, meaning, love, and transcendence—were selected based on their recurrence, conceptual depth, and capacity to articulate an integrated formative itinerary. Semantically related ideas were consolidated into synthetic categories (e.g., "empathy," "*cura personalis*," and "generosity" under the attribute of love), thus constructing a coherent conceptual architecture. The common good, although not included as an independent attribute, appears as a transversal ethical horizon embedded within several of them.

This methodology does not seek to construct an empirical model in the strict sense, but rather a conceptual framework rooted in Ignatian theological

anthropology. While it does not include formal quantitative data, the article integrates qualitative material drawn from several years of teaching practice and the implementation of the Ignatian Leadership course at Universidad Pontificia Comillas, where more than five thousand students have participated since its inception.

Three international experiences have proven especially valuable for triangulating this proposal: at Creighton University, the course Ignatian Leadership: Ethics and Reflection has been a core component of the Leadership Minor since 2016, integrating leadership theory, ethics, and Ignatian spirituality; at Ateneo de Manila University, the mandatory course Discerning Life Questions (DLQ10) combines Ignatian discernment, philosophical inquiry, and vocational formation for more than two thousand students annually; and in Latin America, the Programa de Liderazgo Ignaciano Universitario Latinoamericano (PLIUL), coordinated by AUSJAL since 2007, offers an immersive experience of Ignatian leadership for student leaders across Jesuit universities, centered on the Spiritual Exercises, social analysis, and discernment in action.

In addition, relevant data and experiences have been gathered from other Jesuit universities that have developed similar courses, including ESADE, Universidad de Deusto, Universidad Loyola Andalucía, and Xavier University. The data and testimonies collected show representative patterns that are repeated across diverse institutional and cultural contexts. Interviews and personal communications were also conducted with academic coordinators and program leaders from representative institutions in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. These exchanges served to triangulate institutional information and provide a context-sensitive interpretation of each program's implementation. The analysis of qualitative data was guided by principles of thematic analysis and oriented toward understanding the coherence between the attributes of Ignatian Leadership and the transformative effects perceived by participants.

The interpretive strategy employed in this study reflects the very method of Ignatian pedagogy: centered on discernment, contextual reading, and inner transformation. Rather than offering a fixed model, the findings are presented as a rigorous synthesis grounded in lived experience, in service of academic inquiry and pedagogical praxis in Jesuit higher education.

University Youth and the Crisis of Meaning: Evolutionary, Cultural, and Spiritual Keys

University students—typically between eighteen and twenty-five years of age, a stage Jeffrey Arnett has termed "emerging adulthood"—are in a critical period for shaping their life trajectory. It is a time of identity formation, exploration

of possibilities, and openness to fundamental questions about meaning, commitment, and the future. Yet this maturation process is increasingly shaped by structural dynamics that hinder authentic personal integration.

One of the most decisive factors is digital acceleration and constant exposure to fragmented stimuli. Young subjectivity is formed in an environment saturated with images, opinions, and conflicting narratives, making it difficult to consolidate a stable self. Kenneth Gergen has described this as the "saturated self," the result of multiple internalized voices that colonize inner space.[4] Rather than fostering autonomy, this plurality of identity generates anxiety, dependence on external validation, and a form of chronic fatigue of the self.[5]

This dynamic was identified by Adolfo Nicolás, S.J. (1936–2020; in office 2008–16), as a "globalization of superficiality": a loss of interior depth that disables deep thought, genuine encounter with oneself, and the elaboration of a meaningful life horizon.[6] Added to this, as Jonathan Haidt warns, is a phenomenon of "digital overprotection" that has fostered emotionally fragile individuals, with little tolerance for conflict and difficulty in sustaining long, painful, or ambiguous processes.[7]

This malaise is not merely psychological; it reveals a deeper anthropological crisis. The breakdown of stable relationships—particularly in the family sphere—and the erosion of frameworks of belonging undermine the formation of a solid vocational identity. Freedom, no longer understood as the capacity to orient oneself toward the good, becomes an infinite field of choices, losing its moral density and turning into compulsion.[8] In the absence of community and horizon, desire fragments, and the search for vocation is replaced by the pursuit of validation, as foreseen by Lash and Lasch.[9]

Structural precariousness—economic, institutional, and familial—feeds a perception of an uncertain or even foreclosed future. Franco "Bifo" Berardi has described this atmosphere as "anticipated melancholy": mourning for what

4 Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

5 Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

6 Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., "Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today," *Conference on Jesuit Higher Education*, Mexico City, April 23, 2010.

7 Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2023).

8 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

9 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979); Scott Lash and John Urry, *The End of Organized Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

has not yet been lost but is already felt to be unattainable.[10] Chronic insecurity erodes the desire for commitment and hollows out the meaning of long-term promises. The search for meaning does not disappear, but becomes more solitary, more fragile, and harder to articulate.

Rather than indifference, what is observable is a transformation in how transcendence is approached. While faith once offered a communal, narrative, and ritual framework for the quest for meaning, this function has weakened. Spiritual experience today rarely flows through institutional religious channels, but rather takes on multiple forms—often fragmented, syncretic, and emotionally self-referential.[11] Faith is increasingly experienced as an emotional and subjective phenomenon, disconnected from stable religious traditions. In its place emerges a highly individualized and self-constructed spirituality, shaped by heterogeneous influences such as reiki, decontextualized Eastern philosophy, meditative practices, astrology, tarot, and symbolic forms of neopaganism, among others. Spirituality thus becomes a marketplace of low-demand experiences, where the individual selects what feels good without necessarily engaging in processes of inner transformation, personal growth, or ethical and communal commitment.[12]

This phenomenon—termed "floating spirituality" by Danièle Hervieu-Léger—reflects a dual absence: the loss of credibility in ecclesial structures and the lack of symbolic frameworks robust enough to interpret interior experience.[13] As Juan Antonio Guerrero, S.J. points out, this ego-centered orientation risks degenerating into dynamics of "self-salvation," disconnected from mystery and otherness.[14] Carlo Maria Martini, S.J. (1927–2012) put it succinctly: "Modern man seeks answers, but often in the wrong places."[15] The abundance of spiritual offerings does not guarantee depth; in the absence of intentional formation, personal accompaniment, and a supportive community, such experiences risk becoming peripheral, fragmented, or even trivialized. Far from suggesting spiritual indifference, this landscape reflects an unresolved

10 Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *After the Future* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011).

11 Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

12 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

13 Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Mark Vernon, *After Atheism: Science, Religion and the Meaning of Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

14 Juan Antonio Guerrero, S.J., *Aprender a sentir en Cristo* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2024).

15 Carlo Maria Martini, S.J., *Conversaciones nocturnas en Jerusalén* (Madrid: PPC, 2008).

thirst: transcendence still calls, but in discontinuous, hybrid, and often contradictory ways.[16]

Even within Christianity, there are reductions that impoverish young people's experience of faith. Gabino Uríbarri identifies three frequent distortions: an emotionalism focused on subjective feeling; a moralistic form reduced to norms; and an instrumental view that turns faith into a resource for personal wellbeing.[17] These approaches, though well intentioned, dilute the transformative potential of Christianity and render it culturally irrelevant. As Jean Daniélou, S.J. (1905–74) and Pope Benedict XVI (1927–2022; r.2005–13) warned, when the experience of God is reduced to the logic of the world, it loses its ability to call and regenerate human existence.[18]

In this context, young people need spaces where they can explore their questions with honesty, silence, and critical discernment. It becomes urgent to offer formative responses that do not reduce faith to superficial experience or consumer product. As Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. (1928–2016; in office 1983–2008), reminded, many young people still long to know "who they are and why they are here."[19] But that longing must be accompanied, enlightened, and guided. In light of this diagnosis, one may ask: how can the university—and particularly the Catholic and Jesuit university—receive this search? What pedagogical model can help students integrate their spiritual experience with anthropological rigor and theological depth?

The University as a Space of Truth, Meaning, and Beauty

Since its medieval Christian origins, the university was conceived as a community of inquiry oriented toward the totality of knowledge and the ultimate truth of reality. More than a technical institution, it was a space where reason, illuminated by faith, served the integral formation of the person and the common good. In traditions such as Paris, Bologna, or Salamanca, this unity of

16 Charles Taylor, *Secular Age*.

17 Gabino Uríbarri Bilbao, S.J., "Tres cristianismos insuficientes: Emocional, ético y de autorrealización. Una reflexión sobre la actual inculturación del cristianismo en Occidente," *Estudios eclesiásticos* 78 (2003): 301–31.

18 Jean Daniélou, S.J., *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History* (London / Chicago: Longmans / Henry Regnery, 1958); Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990).

19 Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," Santa Clara University, October 6, 2000.

knowledge, ethics, and transcendence was not decorative but constitutive of the educational project.[20]

Modernity has gradually weakened this vision. The increasing technification of knowledge, the fragmentation of curricula, and the dominance of utilitarian logic have displaced the formative dimension to the margins of university life.[21] Today, most institutions no longer systematically ask what the ultimate goal of education is or how it contributes to the meaning of life. Fundamental questions about the good, the true, or the beautiful have been pushed into the private realm of students or excluded entirely from academic discourse.[22]

In this context, many Catholic universities have undergone a process of functional secularization. Seeking relevance in the global academic environment, they have adopted organizational models and epistemologies that dilute their specific identity. As Kolvenbach warned, the risk is that "the Jesuit university becomes a university like any other," bearing only an ethical or pastoral veneer with no real impact on the core of the educational project.[23] George Weigel and Charles Taylor have both noted that a misunderstood pluralism has sometimes led to an axiological neutrality incompatible with the Christian mission.[24]

This tension has not gone unnoticed within the Society of Jesus. Several Jesuit scholars have voiced concern over the growing disconnect between academic excellence and the Ignatian inspiration that once sustained it. Michael J. Buckley, S.J. (1931–2019), highlighted how many institutions had embraced secular structures of prestige without asking how their mission could be embodied.[25] Likewise, John A. Appleyard, S.J. (1931–2024), and Howard Gray, S.J. (1930–2018), argued that the spiritual dimension had been pushed into the extracurricular sphere, losing its formative force.[26] As Melecio Agúndez, S.J. (1928–2020), succinctly put it in reference to the presence of the

20 Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982); John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

21 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

22 Nuccio Ordine, *La utilidad de lo inútil: Manifiesto* (Barcelona: Acantilado, 2013).

23 Kolvenbach, "The Service of Faith."

24 George Weigel, *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church* (New York: Basic Books, 2013); Charles Taylor, *Secular Age*.

25 Michael J. Buckley, S.J., *The Catholic University as Promise and Project: Reflections in a Jesuit Idiom* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1998).

26 John A. Appleyard, S.J. and Howard Gray, S.J., "Tracking the Mission and Identity Question," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 18 (2000): 4–15, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/mission/pdf/conversations18.pdf (accessed August 4, 2025).

transcendent within Jesuit universities: when one says that God is found in all things without revealing Him in any, the risk is that He ends up being found nowhere.[27]

In recent decades, international initiatives have emerged that seek to recover the integral dimension of education. Programs such as Character Education in Birmingham, Whole Person Education in Hong Kong, and Purpose Learning in the United States reclaim categories like vocation, interiority, and human flourishing as core educational values.[28] Similarly, the Human Flourishing Program at Harvard and the growing literature on character education share a common conviction: without meaning, knowledge becomes sterile.[29]

Within this renewed landscape, the Jesuit tradition offers its own distinctive contribution. As Arturo Sosa, S.J., has emphasized, the aim of the university is to "initiate and accompany personal and social processes of meaning in pursuit of fullness."[30] As Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote, truth lets itself be seen in its splendor;[31] the task of Jesuit higher education is to make that splendor perceptible in the concrete lives of students and the culture they shape.

Ignatian Leadership: An Integral Formative Proposal

Throughout its history—from the *Ratio studiorum* of 1599 to the Universal Apostolic Preferences 2019–2029—the Society of Jesus has maintained a constant commitment to the integral formation of the person and the educational accompaniment of young people toward a whole and meaningful life. Among the most decisive and transformative responses of the Society in recent years to renew and strengthen the identity of its universities is the development of Ignatian Leadership as a formative paradigm.

In the Latin American context, the Programa de Liderazgo Ignaciano Universitario Latinoamericano (PLIUL), coordinated by AUSJAL and initiated

27 Melecio Agúndez, S.J., "El paradigma universitario Ledesma–Kolvenbach," *Revista de fomento social* 63 (2008): 604–631.

28 Kristján Kristjánsson et al., *Teaching Character and Virtue in Schools* (London: Routledge, 2017); Laurie Schreiner and Kaye Louis, *Thriving in Transitions: A Research-Based Approach to College Student Success* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2021).

29 Marvin W. Berkowitz and Melinda C. Bier, *"Research-Based Character Education,"* The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 591 (2004): 72–85.

30 Arturo Sosa, S.J., discurso ante la Asamblea de la Asociación Internacional de Universidades Jesuitas (IAJU), Boston College, 4 de agosto de 2022, citado en "Discerniendo el presente para preparar el futuro de la educación universitaria," *Ibero*: *Revista de educación superior* 68 (September 2022).

31 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics Series*, 7 vols. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982), 1:19.

by the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (Colombia), offers a solid training process that, since 2007, has reached 5,146 students in 17 Jesuit universities across 12 countries. Although voluntary, many participating universities recognize it with academic credits. The program combines 23 weekly in-person sessions, 50 hours of community immersion, and a four-day Ignatian retreat focused on the Principle and Foundation and the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises. It also includes reflective workshops, socio-political analysis, and leadership practices rooted in Ignatian spirituality. Notable participating institutions include Universidad Católica de Córdoba (Argentina), ITESO (Mexico), Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (El Salvador), and Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (Venezuela). Its distinctive hallmark lies in the integration of affective interiority and social responsibility, forming leaders committed to reconciliation, justice, and the common good, particularly in the face of Latin America's structural inequalities.[32]

At Creighton University (United States), the course Ignatian Leadership: Ethics and Reflection has been a cornerstone of the Leadership Minor since 2016. The course weaves together leadership theory, Ignatian spirituality, and applied ethics. It is a space for vocational accompaniment that offers Ignatian tools such as the discernment of spirits, the Examen, and the Principle and Foundation. A distinctive element of the program is the implementation of discernment labs—spaces where students explore real-life cases and ethical challenges from a spiritual perspective, integrating academic theory, inner freedom, and transformative action. The course fosters deep listening, self-awareness, and leadership in service of the healing of the world. The minor spans identity, personal development, social commitment, and professional vocation, offering one of the most comprehensive and structured developments of Ignatian leadership as an integral university formation.[33]

A particularly consolidated and large-scale example is found at Universidad Pontificia Comillas (Spain). Since the 2017–18 academic year, the course Liderazgo Ignaciano—a twenty-hour subject—has been progressively implemented as a mandatory course for undergraduate Business Administration students. By the end of the 2024–25 academic year, a total of 5,043 students will have completed this training. Through the study of the life of St. Ignatius and with a particular emphasis on discernment, the course accompanies students

32 Sheila Gonçalves, email message to the authors, June 2025. Sheila currently serves as assistant to the regional coordination of PLIUL.

33 Erika L. Dakin Kirby, "Ignatian Leadership in the Undergraduate Curriculum and Classroom," *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 9, no. 2 (2020), https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/jhe/vol9/iss2/9 (accessed August 5, 2025). "LDR—Ignatian Leadership: Ethics and Reflection," All Things Ignatian, Creighton University, 2019, 52, https://www.creighton.edu.

in their final years—at the stage of vital decisions—encouraging them to ask themselves the great existential questions.[34]

One of the most rigorous curricular integrations of the Ignatian leadership paradigm can be found in DLQ10—Discerning Life Questions, a required course in the final year of all undergraduate degrees at Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines). DLQ10 serves as a capstone experience within the university's overall human and spiritual formation plan, accompanying students throughout their university journey. It offers a philosophical, theological, and existential reflection on themes such as suffering, hope, fragility, fulfillment, and transcendence, promoting discernment, moral imagination, and vocational orientation. Rooted in phenomenology and Ignatian hermeneutics, the course invites students to articulate their emerging life mission, generating a space for interiority and meaning at a pivotal moment marked by academic pressure, thesis completion, and transition into adult life.[35]

Other Jesuit institutions have developed contextualized versions of the model. In Europe, ESADE Business School has offered the course Ignacio de Loyola: Líder y Formador de Líderes since 2017–18, attended by 134 students over seven editions. With a 20-hour workload, it studies the figure of Ignatius as a leader, alongside inspiring examples of other Jesuits, helping students to discover their own leadership style. At Universidad Loyola Andalucía, the Liderazgo Ignaciano course has been offered as an elective since 2017–18 and has enrolled 751 students. The course spans 60 hours and includes academic content along with experiences of reflection and service. Universidad de Deusto offers a highly selective annual program limited to 15 students per year, with prior interviews. Over the past four years, around 50 students have completed it. The 60-hour program includes two major off-campus experiences: a social volunteer experience and an introductory workshop on Ignatian spirituality.[36]

34 Personal communication from José Manuel Sáenz Rotko, Assistant to the Vice-Rector for Identity and Mission and for Students and Alumni, Universidad Pontificia Comillas, email message to the author, June 24, 2025.

35 Ateneo de Manila University, "The Core Curriculum," Office of the Vice President for the Loyola Schools, accessed July 29, 2025, https://www.ateneo.edu/loyola-schools/core-curriculum (accessed August 5, 2025). See especially the course *DLQ10—Discerning Life Questions*, part of the first-year formation track. Stephanie Y. Puen, email message to the authors, July 29, 2025. Dr. Puen currently serves as coordinator of DLQ10.

36 Cristina Giménez Thomsen, Director of Identity and Mission at ESADE Business School, email message to the authors, July 23, 2025; Francisco de Paula Montero, Vice-Rector for Academic Planning at Universidad Loyola Andalucía, email message to the authors, July 3, 2025; Peio Azpitarte, S.J., professor of Ignatian Leadership at Universidad de Deusto, phone conversation with the authors, July 7, 2025.

Among the international experiences, notable examples include programs developed by institutions such as Xavier University (United States), where the Ignatian Leadership Program (ILP) is a six-week cohort-based initiative that forms student leaders through Jesuit values of service, justice, reflection, and discernment, emphasizing self-awareness, ethical influence, and collaborative action for the common good. Testimonials collected across these diverse contexts reveal transformative patterns: students report having developed greater self-awareness, a deeper integration of their life purpose, and a stronger willingness to live courageously and selflessly in service to others. Although formats vary, the underlying pedagogical architecture remains unified by its spiritual depth, formative rigor, and orientation toward leadership in service of a reconciled and hope-filled future.

Formative Attributes of Ignatian Leadership

The pedagogical itinerary underlying the Ignatian Leadership course unfolds around seven interrelated attributes—conceived not as isolated competencies, but as integrated dimensions that articulate a dynamic process. The anthropological core of Ignatian Leadership rests on a vocational understanding of existence. This formative path is inspired by, and in dialogue with, the vital journey of Saint Ignatius himself, whose personal transformation offers both narrative structure and spiritual depth to the model.

The first attribute, *self-knowledge*, constitutes the entry point into the formative process. It is not a matter of self-referential introspection but of a reconciliatory gaze upon one's personal history, capable of recognizing wounds, talents, and authentic desires. In the First Week of the *Exercises*, Ignatius invites the retreatant to contemplate their life under the light of God's mercy—not to judge it, but to understand it as a place of revelation. This loving gaze—sustained by the daily *Examen*—founds a truthful and humble relationship with oneself, essential to spiritual maturity. In contemporary terms, this dimension resonates with humanistic psychology and existential philosophy, which view coherent identity as the integration of affections, values, and narrative.[37]

From this lucid self-awareness, the second attribute—*interior freedom*—emerges as the capacity to act not out of reaction or compulsion, but from a place of deep availability. Ignatius describes this as "indifference," not in the sense of passivity, but as the freedom to desire what most helps toward the end for which one is created. This disposition breaks the chains of ego, fear, and

37 Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1961); Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

attachment and becomes the basis for ethical, non-instrumental leadership. Whereas contemporary models often equate autonomy with self-sufficiency, Ignatian tradition proposes a freedom guided by love—able to choose the good with responsibility and detachment. This concept engages in critical dialogue with self-determination theory and accounts of positive moral freedom.[38]

Interior freedom, in turn, enables the practice of *discernment*, the third attribute of the path. Far from being a merely rational deliberation, Ignatian discernment is an affective and spiritual reading of reality, attentive to inner movements and their fruits. Ignatius formalizes this process in the Rules of the First and Second Weeks, distinguishing between consolations and desolations, and cultivating the spiritual sensitivity of the person. This capacity to interpret desire vocationally—rather than as mere preference—is a defining trait of the Ignatian paradigm. In morally complex contexts, discernment transcends technical or automatic solutions by integrating ethical judgment, affective resonance, and transcendental orientation.[39]

The fourth attribute, *magis*, expresses the inner dynamism of one touched by love and freedom. Traditionally understood as the desire to choose "what is more conducive to the good of souls," *magis* is not reducible to productivity or performance but reflects a qualitative orientation toward the greater good. It surpasses spiritual complacency and minimal ethical thresholds, propelling the student toward generous and fruitful decisions. For Ignatius, this principle introduced a creative tension between the evangelical ideal and the concrete possibilities of the person. Lived from within, *magis* engenders leadership forms rooted in service, not control.[40]

This orientation attains fullness in the fifth attribute: *meaning*. Here, students are invited to articulate experiences, relationships, and life choices within a narrative that transcends personal interest. In the *Principle and Foundation* (*SpEx* 23), Ignatius offers a structuring key: human life finds meaning in loving service to God and others. This is not an imposed objective but an awakening to a sense of purpose that unifies. In conversation with thinkers such as Viktor Frankl and Paul Ricoeur, Ignatian pedagogy contends that meaning is not constructed but discovered—received as a call that demands a response.

38 Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior* (New York: Plenum, 1985); Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

39 Ignacio de Loyola, *Ejercicios espirituales*, nos. 313–36; Jules J. Toner, *Discerning God's Will: Ignatius of Loyola's Teaching on Christian Decision Making* (St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1991).

40 Pedro Arrupe, S.J., "The Promotion of Justice and the Formation of 'Men for Others,'" Address in Valencia, July 1973.

In the university setting, this perspective reconnects academic formation with existential orientation, countering dispersion and loss of purpose.[41]

The sixth attribute, *love*, constitutes the ethical core of Ignatian leadership. It is not a fleeting emotion but a stable disposition toward openness and self-gift, especially to the vulnerable. In the *Contemplation to Attain Love* (*SpEx* 230–37), Ignatius presents love as something received and given: one loves because one has been loved. This logic of reciprocity opposes any narcissistic, competitive, or instrumental understanding of leadership. In Jesuit tradition, love translates into justice, proximity, and effective service. Kolvenbach captured this formative ideal in the image of "men and women for others," an expression that encapsulates an ethic of affective and social responsibility. In modern terms, this dimension aligns with care ethics, servant leadership, and relational justice theories.[42]

The final attribute, *transcendence*, offers the ultimate horizon of the process. It is not presented as a doctrinal imposition but as an opening to the experience of the mystery that dwells in the world and the human heart. Ignatius taught the search for God "in all things," and this intuition has shaped the spirituality of the Compañía de Jesús since its inception. Transcendence does not close the journey; it expands it—inviting wonder, gratuity, and fidelity to the invisible. Within university life, this dimension represents a quiet counterculture against nihilism, self-reliance, and disenchantment. By integrating this radical openness, Ignatian pedagogy does not impose belief but accompanies each student's unique journey toward meaning, recognizing the irreducible spiritual question that lives within every human being.[43]

These seven attributes configure an integral itinerary that moves from interior to exterior, from introspection to engagement. While each has value in itself, their strength multiplies when lived together, following the dynamic logic of the Spiritual Exercises. Self-knowledge enables interior freedom; freedom opens the space for deep discernment; *magis* inspires generous service; meaning unifies the journey; love grounds relationships; and transcendence enlarges the horizon. Rather than static achievements, these attributes interweave in a lifelong formative process—unfinished, ever deepening, and always oriented to the fullness of life.

41 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006); Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

42 Kolvenbach, "The Service of Faith."

43 Ignacio de Loyola, *Ejercicios espirituales*, n. 235; von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*.

TABLE 1 Core attributes of Ignatian leadership and their formative correlates

Attribute	Moments in the life of Ignatius	Assessment indicators	Primary virtue	Core competencies
Self-awareness	– Pamplona (battle wound) – Loyola (convalescence, reading saints' lives)	– Capacity for introspection – Identification of personal patterns – Awareness of motivations	Humility	Intrapersonal intelligence, critical reflection, and metacognition
Interior freedom	– Montserrat (surrender of the sword) – Manresa (scruples and release) – Repeated confessions	– Freely made decisions – Conscious detachment – Overcoming internal/external pressures	Detachment	Autonomy, decision-making, and emotional regulation
Discernment	– Loyola (spiritual attraction) – Paris (choosing companions) – Venice–Rome (apostolic discernment)	– Distinction between consolation/desolation – Peaceful decisions – Alignment of intention and action	Wisdom	Critical thinking, ethical deliberation, moral judgment
Magis	– Venice (missionary waiting) – Rome (global mission) – Foundation of Jesuit works	– Commitment to the common good – Priority discernment – Desire to love and serve more	Generosity	Transformational leadership, strategic vision, initiative

TABLE 1 Core attributes of Ignatian leadership and their formative correlates (*cont.*)

Attribute	Moments in the life of Ignatius	Assessment indicators	Primary virtue	Core competencies
Meaning	– Cardoner (vision of God in all things) – Writing of Principle and Foundation	– Life-purpose coherence – Integration of personal mission – Forward-looking hope	Hope	Deep motivation, vocational orientation, and life coherence
Love	– Manresa (encounter with the poor) – Rome (companionship) – Spiritual letters	– Capacity for self-gift – Empathic relationships – Active compassion	Charity	Ethics of care, empathy, and collaboration
Transcendence	– Pilgrimage to Jerusalem – Cardoner (mystical vision) – Rome (universal mission contemplation)	– Openness to Mystery – Recognition of the sacred in daily life – Spiritual depth	Trust	Spiritual sensitivity, existential awareness, openness to the sacred

TABLE 2 Pedagogical practices associated with the seven attributes

Attribute	Expanded classroom methodologies
Self-awareness	· Lifeline narrative and timeline of significant events · Values tree and discussion of inherited vs. chosen values · 360 ° feedback from peers and instructors · Daily examen practiced weekly in silence · Emotional mapping of ethical dilemmas · Journaling on personal wounds · Dialogue circles around formative experiences

TABLE 2 Pedagogical practices associated with the seven attributes (*cont.*)

Attribute	Expanded classroom methodologies
Interior freedom	· Mapping personal attachments and inner scripts · Recognizing inner voices (ego, fear, grace) · Simulations of conflicting pressures · Affective detachment exercises · Visualizing decisions from a place of freedom · Guided silence and symbolic actions
Discernment	· Examen applied to real decisions · Simulated discernment processes · Motion journal of inner movements · Group discernment exercises · Ignatian decision analysis · Role-play of spiritual accompaniment
Magis	· Aspirations wheel · Countercultural debate on depth vs. efficiency · Design of service projects with impact criteria · Analysis of Jesuit works through *magis* lens · Letters to one's future self · Narratives of generous historical figures
Meaning	· Writing one's own Principle and Foundation · Meaning map connecting events, values, hopes · Epitaph exercise · Reflections linking Ignatius's life and one's own · Dialogues on loss, suffering, coherence · Film analysis with existential framing (e.g., *The Mission*)
Love	· Empathy training and deep listening · Letters of gratitude or forgiveness (not sent) · Group volunteering and structured reflection · Silent contemplation of others' dignity · Sharing vulnerability in small groups · Justice-oriented service case studies
Transcendence	· Guided silence in nature, chapel, or quiet space · Letter to God (or the Mystery): doubts, reproaches, desire · Deep listening circle on one's vision of God · Spiritual memory timeline · Reading and resonance of mystical texts (Ignatius, Hillesum, Merton) · Guest faith testimonies in class

Methodology, Pedagogical Style, and Assessment

The course methodology integrates theoretical exposition, sapiential readings, self-awareness exercises, experiential dynamics, collaborative work, accompaniment spaces, personal testimonies, and times of silence. Drawing on experiential and reflective learning, as developed by John Dewey (1859–1952)

and David Kolb,[44] as well as the pedagogy of the question proposed by Paulo Freire (1921–97),[45] the course aims to generate processes of awareness and transformation. As García de Castro notes, the goal is to "create the conditions for students to pause, recognize themselves, engage in meaningful dialogue, and narrate their lives with purpose."

The classroom is envisioned as a safe, free, and quiet space, where voluntary participation and respectful silence are equally valued—fostering a deeply human formative experience. Although some students initially approach the course with hesitation—due to its spiritual dimension or the fear of introspection—the Ignatian framework evokes a respected tradition that helps overcome prejudice and encourages receptivity. Many acknowledge, by the end, that they would not have enrolled in such a subject by choice, and that its compulsory nature opened up an unexpected path of personal growth.

From the very first session, students are invited to set aside electronic devices and bring only a notebook and pen, fostering attention, presence, and interiorization. Sessions begin with an evocative question and end with an open space for resonance, where students may share what they have felt or intuited. The role of the instructor is essential: it requires academic training, experience in spiritual accompaniment, and a familiarity with Ignatian pedagogy. Coordination between instructors ensures pedagogical coherence without suppressing personal teaching style.

The classroom becomes a community of seekers. The interaction among students often generates what some describe as a "contagion of search," where one person's question sparks insight in another. Faithful to its sapiential orientation, assessment within the Ignatian Leadership course is not conceived as control but as discernment. Its purpose is to help students integrate what they have experienced, recognizing transformations, resistances, and decisions. The focus lies on the process rather than the outcome, prioritizing interior evolution over mere acquisition of content. The final grade combines four components: active participation (20%), weekly reflection exercises (20%), the reading of a biography of Saint Ignatius (20%), and a final personal narrative or Memoria (40%).

This final paper constitutes the core evaluative element and revolves around questions such as: Who am I? What am I seeking? What moves me? How do I make decisions? Where do I want to orient my life? The student articulates an

44 John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938); David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984).

45 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970).

existential journey through this narrative exercise, revealing the degree of integration achieved. To support this process, and in keeping with the formative nature of the course, the following proposed rubric offers guiding criteria while preserving the primacy of depth and authenticity over formal performance:

TABLE 3 Proposed evaluation rubric for the ignatian leadership course

Criterion	Description	Weight
Depth of reflection	Demonstrates honest interior exploration, recognition of inner movements, and growing self-awareness.	30%
Conceptual integration	Connects personal experience with key Ignatian concepts such as discernment, *magis*, and interior freedom.	25%
Vocational orientation	Begins to formulate a personal sense of meaning and values—an emerging "principle and foundation" in Ignatian terms.	20%
Coherence and structure	The paper is clearly written, well-organized, and follows a logical progression.	10%
Affective resonance	Expresses authenticity, emotional depth, and signs of real interior transformation.	15%

Impact and Significance

This section synthesizes key indicators from faculty evaluations, student testimonies, and reflections from instructors across universities in Europe, the Americas, and Asia, highlighting the transformative potential of Ignatian Leadership courses.

At Universidad Pontificia Comillas, recent course evaluations show an average teaching score of 8.29 out of 10, indicating a high level of satisfaction.[46] Beyond the numbers, a qualitative analysis of over 1,200 personal reflections reveals recurrent themes: the value of pausing amid academic pressures, the transformative power of existential questioning, the relevance of Ignatian discernment, and the importance of identifying one's deepest desires and vocation. Written in contexts of silence and accompaniment, these reflections often signal a profound shift in how students interpret their biography, future,

46 Sáenz Rotko, email message to the authors, June 24, 2025.

and life purpose. As one student expressed: "You've shaken me up, and now I need to think about what I want, what I have, and what I'm going to do." Another wrote: "This was not just another course; it helped me discover myself and view my life story in a new light." Several students added that "this course allowed me to ask questions I had never voiced before" and "made me think about things I normally avoid thinking about," clearly pointing to an activation of their reflective and vocational dimension.[47]

At Creighton University, where Ignatian Leadership: Ethics and Reflection is part of the undergraduate leadership track, 93% of students reported that the course led them to reconsider their role as leaders. In follow-up surveys, 100% of alumni stated the course had positively contributed to their personal development. Professor Tom Kelly, Ph.D., emphasizes the theological foundation of the course: "Ignatian leadership does not begin from anything other than our relationship with God [...]. One can be immensely successful according to the dictates of the world, but if we lack love, what does it benefit us?" One student echoed this sentiment: "I've begun to reflect more on the kind of person I want to become."

This ethical and spiritual dimension is closely connected to the Ignatian concept of *magis*, understood not as perfectionism but as a formation of desire oriented toward service and the common good. Charles Thomas Jr., Ed.D., CEO of Clear Cloud and Creighton alumnus, summarizes it this way: "Magis: Ignatian-based leadership teaches us to learn more so that we can do more and be more for ourselves and others. If I do not put in mega effort to make myself better, how can I be of value to others?"[48]

A similar impact is visible at Ateneo de Manila University, where the DLQ10 leadership course has been part of the core curriculum since 2018. With over ten thousand students having completed it, institutional evaluations confirm its formative value, with student ratings between 4.68 and 4.8 out of 5 in areas such as relevance, depth, and stimulation of critical thinking. Many describe it

47 Personal reflections by two students at Universidad Pontificia Comillas, submitted as coursework for the Ignatian Leadership subject: one from the E-6 program (Business Administration and International Relations), academic year 2021–22; and another from the E-3 program (Business Administration and Law), academic year 2022–23. Unpublished documents in the author's possession.

48 Cindy Murphy McMahon, "Ignatian Principles Inform Creighton's Pursuit of New Leadership," Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), April 25, 2022. https://ajcunet.edu/2022-4-25-creighton-thematic. Dakin Kirby, "Ignatian Leadership."

as a meaningful space for reflection and discernment at a pivotal stage of their academic and personal lives.[49]

At Loyola Andalucía, the course maintains a consistent average of 7.29 out of 10 over the past four academic years. Students particularly highlight its reflective focus, which fosters self-awareness and introspection, along with the participation of students from diverse disciplines, enabling interdisciplinary dialogue. Classroom dynamics also promote active listening and respect for differing perspectives.[50]

At ESADE Business School, one of Europe's leading business and leadership institutions, a course on Ignatius of Loyola consistently receives the highest satisfaction ratings (6.5 to 7 on a 7-point scale). More importantly, qualitative feedback underscores its transformative dimension. One student wrote: "More than theoretical content, the course gave me space to express myself freely and reflect on questions shaped by values, culture, and personal experience. The idea that identity and personal ethics are not static but evolve in dialogue with others was one of the most valuable lessons."[51]

These accounts confirm that even in secular, non-confessional settings, courses inspired by the Ignatian tradition can cultivate ethical depth, leadership awareness, and enduring personal insight. As one student from Creighton put it: "This class alone has forced me to be reflective on my leadership experiences, which has made me realize things I am good at and things I need to work on, which is extremely helpful." A student from Comillas expressed a similar realization: "It helped me see that I didn't know myself as well as I thought." Another noted, "I had never taken the time to calmly consider where I want to go. This course helped me organize my ideas and make decisions."[52]

In Latin America, the PLIUL (Programa de Liderazgo Ignaciano Universitario Latinoamericano), coordinated by Antonio Ramírez at the Instituto Politécnico Loyola (Dominican Republic), combines spiritual retreats, social immersion experiences, and experiential leadership training. The use of the Spiritual Exercises, silence, and digital disconnection—initially challenging for students who study and work simultaneously—is deeply appreciated. "It's hard for them not to speak or use their phones, but they feel liberated and rested by it," Ramírez explains. The program fosters a vision of leadership as social

49 Ateneo de Manila University, "The Core Curriculum." See also Puen, email message to the authors, July 29, 2025.

50 Francisco de Paula Montero, email message to the authors, July 3, 2025.

51 Cristina Giménez Thomsen, email message to the authors, July 23, 2025.

52 Student reflections submitted as coursework for the Ignatian Leadership subject at Universidad Pontificia Comillas, various academic years. Unpublished documents in the author's possession.

responsibility, cultivated through visits to prisons, orphanages, and rehabilitation centers. These experiences shape students' perspectives: "Every time they make a decision, they begin to consider those who are most vulnerable."[53]

Former student Daphne Tuches (PLIUL, 2014) reflects on the program's long-term impact: "It helped me discover leadership gifts I didn't know I had. Today, I can see how those gifts have helped me professionally and spiritually, to become a better person."

At Universidad de Deusto, Peio Azpitarte, S.J., emphasizes the importance of experiential dynamics in his course, such as the weekly Examen and work with the discernment rules from the Spiritual Exercises. Small-group settings foster a sense of intimacy where students often "see themselves reflected, learn to read their own lives, and begin to ask, honestly and deeply, what they are being called to." The experiential focus—rather than theoretical abstraction—is one of the most valued features.[54]

Taken together, these indicators suggest that integrating Ignatian Leadership into the university curriculum—anchored in a coherent anthropological, spiritual, and pedagogical framework—can generate deep processes of transformation. Students not only acquire leadership competencies but also undergo a deepening of their identity, purpose, and sense of responsibility, which is in line with the Ignatian ideal of forming men and women for others.

Implementation Guidelines for Jesuit Institutions

The successful implementation of an Ignatian Leadership course depends on three key conditions: explicit institutional support, qualified faculty, and curricular coherence. The course should not be treated as an isolated or optional initiative, but integrated into the academic structure as an expression of the university's formative mission and Jesuit identity.

Institutional resistance—especially from faculty unfamiliar with its purpose—should be addressed through ongoing communication. It is important to explain that the university, by offering this course, seeks to remain faithful to its tradition and to offer students one of its most valuable contributions: an education that integrates personal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

A gradual implementation strategy is recommended: starting with one faculty or program, evaluating the experience, and expanding in subsequent years. Embedding the course in upper-level undergraduate programs ensures

53 Antonio Ramírez, coordinator of the Programa de Liderazgo Ignaciano Universitario Latinoamericano (PLIUL) at the Instituto Politécnico Loyola (Dominican Republic), videoconference with the authors, July 14, 2025.

54 Peio Azpitarte, S.J., phone conversation with the authors, July 7, 2025.

greater maturity and better integration. Proper scheduling, collaboration with academic deans, and protection of the course from substitution in international exchanges help consolidate its presence.

Faculty formation is essential. Instructors must be intellectually prepared, spiritually grounded, and capable of creating spaces for silence, dialogue, and discernment. They should be familiar with the Spiritual Exercises, affective pedagogy, and narrative evaluation—and united by a clear orientation toward Christ, even if each brings a personal style.

Finally, the course has greater impact when it is part of a broader institutional effort that includes opportunities for community engagement, spiritual accompaniment, and personal reflection—extending the work begun in the classroom.

Limitations of the Study and Future Lines of Research

This study offers a conceptual and hermeneutic framework grounded in the Ignatian tradition, but does not include systematic empirical validation. The testimonies and experiences cited are illustrative rather than methodologically conclusive. Although the model builds on a prior scoping review, it does not replicate that protocol nor apply tools like PRISMA, focusing instead on transferability and pedagogical coherence.

Its cultural and spiritual foundations reflect a Christian, Jesuit context. While the model may be relevant beyond confessional settings, further adaptation to secular, multifaith, or non-Western environments remains a pending task.

Future research could include longitudinal case studies on student development, structured qualitative studies (interviews, focus groups, journals), and the creation of assessment tools—such as rubrics or psychometric instruments—to evaluate the core attributes. It would also be valuable to explore the course's impact on faculty and to design training programs that support instructors in embodying this pedagogical model.

Conclusion

The crisis of meaning experienced by many university students today is not an isolated or superficial phenomenon, but rather the symptom of a deeper anthropological fracture that affects the very foundations of human and

educational experience. In response to this existential void—manifested in inner fragmentation, loss of horizon, and disconnection between knowledge and life—Jesuit universities are called to decisively reclaim their original vocation: to be spaces of search, existential synthesis, and transformation.

The Ignatian Leadership course, as presented in this study, emerges as a bold and urgent pedagogical response. Through an experiential itinerary structured around seven interrelated attributes—tracing a path from self-knowledge to transcendence, from the personal to the communal—this proposal offers students a concrete path of personal maturation and vocational openness. Its distinctiveness lies in an anthropology of vocation, an experiential spirituality inspired by the Spiritual Exercises, and an integrative pedagogy that weaves together reason, affectivity, freedom, and service.

The accumulated experience in Jesuit universities across Europe, the Americas, and Asia—and the qualitative evaluation of thousands of students—confirms that this course is acting as a catalyst for reintroducing the great existential questions into an increasingly technocratic university, becoming a space of intense engagement with meaning, truth, and human fulfillment. It helps students formulate and begin to answer their most profound existential questions, and many express gratitude that someone offered them a structured path—acknowledging that they could not have walked it alone or gone so far without it.

This model, already tested and replicable, must be embraced institutionally with resolve, integrated as a required subject in the curriculum, and sustained through specific faculty formation—knowing, for those who so wish, that at the ultimate horizon of all searching lies the God of Jesus Christ. In a world wounded by emptiness and superficiality, this course represents an act of active hope, an educational form of resistance against contemporary fragmentation, and a determined commitment to the deep renewal of the university experience.